

Make a date for your baby's four-month checkup

Your baby will grow and change quickly in her first year. That's why checkups are needed so often during this time. The four-month checkup is the perfect time to ask questions about her health, growth and development, and immunizations. Take notes during the visit. You may want to share these with your baby's other caregivers. Bring her Lifetime Immunization Record card and Childhood Health Record booklet with you to every appointment.



Immunize your baby on time

It's best to immunize your baby at the earliest recommended age. Infants are more likely than older children to become very ill, be hospitalized, or even die from diseases that vaccines prevent. Your baby can be immunized even if he is taking antibiotics or has a minor illness such as a cold, diarrhea, or a fever. Vaccines will still be effective and won't make him sicker. The following vaccines are recommended at the four-month checkup:

- Rotavirus (RV)
- Diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (DTaP)
- Inactivated poliovirus (IPV)
- *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib)
- Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV)

A dose of hepatitis B (HepB) vaccine may be needed.

Until your baby is old enough to get vaccinated against flu, chickenpox, and measles, be sure those in close contact with him are immunized.

Babies need only breast milk or formula now

Your baby's tummy won't be ready for solid foods, including baby cereal, until she is at least six months old. You'll know she is ready when she can sit with support, hold her head steady, and take food from a spoon.

Feeding your baby solids before six months can increase her risk of obesity, food allergies, and constipation.

Adding cereal to your baby's bottle won't help her fall asleep or sleep longer.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends breastfeeding your baby for a year. Breast milk may protect her from colds, ear infections, diabetes, and obesity. Breastfeeding also helps immunizations work better. For answers to breastfeeding questions, visit www.lllofwa.org. (If you're on WIC, call your local WIC clinic.)

If your baby drinks formula, use iron-fortified formula to help prevent anemia (low iron in the blood). Hold your baby while you feed her. She needs to cuddle with you and look at your face even when she can hold her own bottle.

Vitamin D is important for everyone. Breastfeeding babies and babies drinking less than 32 ounces of formula a day need a vitamin D supplement. Ask your doctor about vitamin D or iron supplements.

Sleep and your baby

Most babies this age wake up two or three times a night. Some wake up more, some less. This is normal, but can be hard for new parents. This pattern of sleeping and waking helps your baby's brain grow and develop and keeps him safe and healthy. In a few months, your baby will start to sleep longer without waking. Some infants naturally need more or less sleep than others. Your family and your baby will develop your own sleep pattern.

Start a positive bedtime routine at the same time every night. This could include having a bath and diaper change, quiet playtime, and reading a book. Avoid loud noises and bright lights before bed. Lay your baby down on his back while he's drowsy but awake. This gives him practice falling asleep in bed. Don't worry if he wakes up right away. Soothe him and try again when he's ready.

Keeping Your Baby Healthy and Safe

Mom: Help your body recover from pregnancy

Eat well and take care of yourself so that you have enough energy to take care of your baby and do the things you love. Eat foods from each of the five food groups (protein, dairy, grains, fruits, and vegetables) every day. No single food can give your body everything it needs. Eat healthy snacks and avoid soda and sweetened juice drinks.

- Continue taking your prenatal vitamins or a multi-vitamin with iron and folic acid. They provide nutrients that your body still needs.
- Try to get some exercise, such as walking, outside every day. Start slowly. If you have questions about what exercise is safe for you, talk to your doctor.
- It's healthiest to wait at least one year before getting pregnant again, especially if your baby was born early. To learn more or to find out where to get low-cost birth control, call the Family Health Hotline at 1-800-322-2588.
- Try to reduce stress. Get dental care. If you smoke, stop. Call 1-877-44U-QUIT (1-877-448-7848) or visit www.smokefree.gov for help quitting smoking.

Recognize postpartum depression

If you feel sad, anxious, or like you can't handle things, you could have postpartum depression (PPD). PPD is very common and does **not** mean you are not a good mother. Talk about your feelings with your doctor and other people you trust. You can also call Postpartum Support International of Washington at 1-888-404-7763, or visit www.del.wa.gov/development/strengthening/speakup.aspx. It is important to get help. Healthy feelings between you and your baby are important for your baby's growth and development.

Prevent your baby from getting a flat head

Your baby might get a flat spot on her head from lots of time spent lying on her back. This is because her skull is soft and her neck muscles are weak. Flattening usually goes away on its own. Give your baby plenty of "tummy time" when she is awake. This will help keep her from getting a flat spot. It also helps make her stronger. Hold her in your arms often. If your baby is bottle fed, hold her on your right side for one feeding, the left side for the next. If your baby is breastfed, she gets switched from side to side as you move her from one breast to the other.

Reduce the risk of SIDS

To reduce the risk of SIDS, it is **very important** to lay your baby on his back every time you put him to sleep. Make sure that everyone who takes care of him does this. If your baby was born early or has a health problem, talk with your doctor or nurse about the best sleep position for his special needs.

Keep your baby away from people who are smoking. Do not allow anyone to smoke in your home or in the car. Babies who breathe smoke are at higher risk for SIDS.

Have a plan for when baby cries

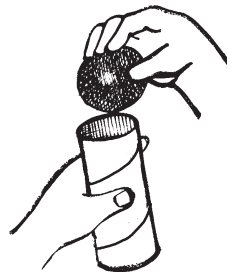
All babies cry! It's normal for babies to cry from two to four hours a day. Crying is one way your baby tells you what she needs. Even though you know crying is normal, it can still be very stressful. Plan ahead for what you will do if you ever feel like shaking or hurting your baby:

- Gently lay the baby down on his back in a safe place and stay ten feet away.
- Take slow, deep breaths until you feel calmer.
- Call a friend or the Family Help Line at 1-800-932-4673 for help.

Share your plan. Make sure that everyone who takes care of your baby knows they should never shake him. Tell them to call you right away if they get frustrated.

Babies can choke on small things

Babies explore by putting things into their mouths. Small toys and coins can be dangerous. Anything small enough to slip into a toilet paper tube can choke your baby. Make sure older children do not give him small toys or pieces of food. Call your local hospital, or health or fire department to find out about infant CPR and first aid classes.



Prevent your baby from falling

Always keep at least one hand on your baby when she is on a bed, sofa, or changing table. She could make a sudden move, or roll or wiggle off the edge. If you need to answer the door or the telephone while changing your baby, carry her with you. You can also put her in her crib or in a safe place on the floor. If you use a play seat, use one without wheels. When your baby is in a reclining seat, make sure to buckle the safety strap.